

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

Old Age and Death

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woman! You are leaving an old woman!' Finally our mother couldn't stand it any longer and, although she was not responsible for that old woman, she turned back and got the old woman to camp by letting her hang onto the travois. But we didn't have to carry her because she died shortly after that." 888

Takes The Bow mentioned that in the dim past, rather than to go off and leave an aged relative, the Gros Ventres used to ask some outstanding warrior to kill this old person—a father, or mother, or grandparent. This was done in order to get those who were suffering "out of their misery." The relative who took this responsibility would authorize the killer to count coup on the one whom he killed and thus score another mark of distinction for his record.* Other Gros Ventres were of the opinion that this type of "mercy killing" was adopted from the Blackfoot and that it was rarely carried out by the Gros Ventres, although admittedly abandonment of the aged to starvation was sometimes forced upon them.

DEATH

The Gros Ventres valued life highly and prayed for long lives, but when a person knew he was about to die, it was said that he resigned himself and appreciated the efforts on the part of others to ease his last moments. There was a desire to die surrounded by one's family and friends who would see to it that the proper last steps were taken. In view of this, if a man were wounded in an encounter with the enemy, every effort would be made by his companions—even at great personal risk—to get him back to his family before he would die. 761 763 [727]

When all hope for life had been abandoned, the dying person was dressed in the best clothes available, his hair combed, and his face painted "as though he were going to a party." Frequently last minute instructions would be given by the dying concerning his preference as to method of final disposal. He might also include advice to his survivors, and make occasional bequests of 763

*It is interesting to note in this connection that Cocking, 1772, p. 112, writes of the Gros Ventres: "They torture all the aged of both sexes in a most shocking and deliberate manner." The context is not clear, however, and he may have been referring to treatment of prisoners of war.

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[761] say: "It is not good to ask that kind of a career [from powers]. It would be a life misspent and would be dearly paid for. Man's dearest possession is life, and this would be cut off."

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761 Charles Buckman had heard old men say that, although they had fasted and prayed over and over again for power, they had never had even a dream, and that this may have been why they had lived to old age.

According to The Boy, his father Lame Bull, when a young man, dreamed that the being who lived on Baldy Butte in the Bear Paw Mountains called him. So on one occasion when the Gros Ventres were camped near this butte, Lame Bull thought this was a good time to accept the invitation and go up on this butte and sleep. He was getting ready to do so, when his father gave him a sound scolding: "I always told you not to try to be a holy man, a man with power of that kind. Those who have such power do not live long. Forget about sleeping on the mountain and attend to the horses and lodge poles. We need you at home. Mind your own business. So Lame Bull did not get to sleep on the mountain. His father was boss."

Coming Daylight came back repeatedly to the same theme. "I am not a medicine woman [with power] and that is why I have lived to be such an old woman." "I am not sorry I refused the medicine power offered me in a dream. Medicine people die soon. It seems like they have a certain time to die and they don't live to be old like myself and Singer. These medicine people are not strong like others." "I never accepted any kind of power. Those who have power die too soon." "They [the beings] used to trick people into taking all these things [powers] because they wanted them to die. The holy dreams are very tricky."

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778 Singer gave her own experience. "I used to take a blanket or other offering and put it in deep water and pray that they [apparently the water monsters] would have pity on me. One night after I had just done this I dreamed that a person was standing there and that nearby lay the emaciated body of one who was very sick. This person told me: 'I give you my body.' This is the way a being puts it in a dream when going to bestow power. Then the person showed me how to doctor, he used a pipe-stem which